

WORLD CHRISTIAN BOOKS

**MAN IN  
GOD'S PURPOSE**

**STEPHEN NEILL**



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WORLD CHRISTIAN BOOKS NO. 36

*Second Series*

**MAN IN  
GOD'S PURPOSE**

*What is man?*

*by*

STEPHEN NEILL

III

ASSOCIATION PRESS, NEW YORK

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*The Scripture quotations in this book are taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible*

## CHAPTER ONE

### *MAN AS GOD MADE HIM*

Man is a strange creature; and one of the strangest things about him is his habit of asking questions about himself. Most of us, looking back to childhood, can remember a moment at which we asked ourselves the question, "Who am I?" This can be rather a frightening moment. Who is asking the question? And about whom is it being asked? Are there two selves or only one?

But it is not only about our own particular self that we ask questions. From the beginning men have asked the question "What is man?" This can mean one of a number of different things. It may mean no more than, "What do we mean when we use the word 'man'?" It may mean, "What is human nature?", or, "What do we mean when we speak of mankind as a whole?" But the question can look rather deeper than that; it may really be asking, "What is man here for?" Then it is a question not just about man's nature, but also about his destiny. Has this species called "mankind" a future, and, if so, what kind of a future is it likely to be?

Naturally a great many different answers have been given to such questions.

One of the earliest answers is the definition, given by a Greek philosopher, that man is a two-legged creature without wings. As a definition this will take us quite a long way. It distinguishes us from all the four-footed creatures and the creeping things, and also from the birds, which also have two legs but have wings. But the important thing about this definition is that it puts us firmly where in one aspect of our

being we belong—among the many and varied living creatures that exist on the earth. Man is an animal. The Bible tells us this quite plainly; that God took of the dust of the earth and made man from it (Gen. 2 : 7). As living beings we belong to this visible earth and are part of it. We are made up of the same substances as the other living creatures. In many ways our bodies are like theirs. The process by which human children are brought into being is almost exactly the same as that which we can observe among the animals. We must take into ourselves from the air and the water and the soil the various substances that are necessary in order to maintain our life. When we have used these substances, we give back the waste products to the earth. As long as we can go on giving and receiving in this way, we continue to live. When we can no longer do so, we die, just as the animals die. And then our bodies go back to the dust from which they were taken (Gen. 3 : 19).

Of course that is not the whole story, but it is a part of it. And why should we be ashamed of it? God has filled the world with a splendid variety of beautiful and interesting creatures. Life in all its forms is wonderful. We are so used to living that most of the time we just take it for granted. But when with the help of the scientists we discover the immensely complicated processes that are going on in our bodies all the time, we begin to realize the marvel of it. As we learn that a slight lack of balance in the chemical substances that we take in from the world around us can lead to grave sickness, we may well be astonished that we go on living at all, still more that most of us manage to keep in pretty good health most of the time. When the Psalmist said, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139 : 14 A.V.), he was thinking mainly of man's physical nature, and of the power and wisdom of God as seen in the bodies that He has given us.

Man, then, is an animal. But, if we look at him closely, we

are bound to admit that he is a rather exceptional animal. Here are some of the things that make him really different even from the animals that are nearest to him in structure and appearance:

1. Man's upright posture. He alone walks upright, and maintains his balance on two feet without the use of his hands to aid him.

2. The movable thumb. Man can move his thumb in any direction, and bring it directly into contact with any of his four fingers or with two or three together. This makes of the human hand a tool more flexible and sensitive than anything found elsewhere in the animal kingdom.

3. The enlarged brain. The brain of every normal human individual is far more complex than that of any animal, and larger than that of any animal in relation to the size of his body. This is true of man in comparison with those apes that come nearest to him in size and form. It is nonsense to speak of man as though he was just one of the higher apes.

4. Man is the fire-using animal. All wild creatures fear the fire; none has mastered it and subjected it to its use. Even men know that fire is dangerous. But the old Greek myth about Prometheus, who stole fire from the gods and brought it down to men, has a great deal of truth in it; here is one chief source of our power over nature and over the animal kingdom.

5. Man is the tool-using animal. We do see among the animals, and especially among those that have been in touch with man, certain activities that are a little like those of man—the beaver building his dam is an obvious example. But there is little to compare with the skill by which man at a very early date learnt to multiply his own strength by using the principle of the lever, and to make himself effective at a distance by the power of the javelin and the arrow.

6. Man is the purpose-forming animal. Here again we touch something that is not completely new. Animals have their

instincts—the ants and squirrels store up food for the winter, and within limits animals can learn to adapt themselves to changed circumstances. But man can form purposes that will involve the use of many materials, perhaps the co-operation of many other men, over a long period of time. He can change and modify these plans, and find most ingenious means to overcome the obstacles that might threaten to thwart him. He cannot work with the neatness and precision of the bees or of the ants; but whereas they go on century after century in the same old pattern, man is always building on past experience and learning to do new things.

7. Man is the speaking animal. This is perhaps the most wonderful of all his gifts. The animals do communicate with one another—we are just beginning to understand the method by which the bees exchange information with one another. But human beings possess articulate speech. They can talk not only about things and actions, but about images and ideas. No race of men on the earth is without articulate speech. It might be thought that the speech of primitive peoples would be very simple. In point of fact this is not the case; some of the languages of very simple peoples are surprisingly rich and complex.

8. Man has found a way to leave a record of his doings behind him. We all have memory, and we know how this faculty can be trained also in animals, for instance in dogs. But, since man learnt to write, there has been a memory of the race as well as of the individual; knowledge is not lost; each generation can start where the old left off, and hope to do new and perhaps better things.

9. Man is a praying animal. It is possible that the animals pray; if so, we have no knowledge of their doing so. But every man has the capacity to pray. Even those peoples which lead the very simplest kind of life have their religion, their sometimes elaborate worship and ways of approaching the unseen powers

When we take all of these things into account, it may not seem an evidence of unreasonable pride if man ventures to think of himself as the crown of creation. In himself he is weak and helpless. He cannot run like the deer or leap like the tiger. He has neither fur to keep him warm, nor fierce claws to protect himself against his enemies. The human baby when born is more helpless than the young of any other creature, and needs to be looked after for a longer period before it is able to look after itself. And yet man really has made himself master of his world. He has killed off some of the most dangerous animals, tamed others and put them to his service. He has destroyed a great many beautiful things. But he has also learned to work with God in the production of beauty. God first gave the gifts; but it was man who produced the harvest-field and the rose-garden.

We sometimes ask ourselves whether we are the only race of this kind that exists anywhere in the universe. The answer is that we simply do not know. Some great scientists have told us that it is unlikely that life, anything like the life we know here, can exist anywhere else in the universe. Others tell us that the universe is so vast that we cannot set any limit to the possibilities of what may exist in it. In any case, this is only an interesting discussion, and does not affect anything with which we are concerned in this book. We may suppose that God has a great many plans in His world of which we know nothing, and we can leave them all safely in His hand; we are concerned here only with God and His purposes for us as men.

A much more important question concerns the origin of man. How did he come into being? To this the Bible gives us a quite clear answer, which is accepted by all Christians. God created man. Man is completely dependent on God for his existence. It was by His will that the race of men came into

being in the beginning. It is only by His will that we are kept in being to-day. Of course those who are not Christians do not accept this view; but in this book it is the Christian view that we are studying.

There are, however, differences of view among Christians as to the way in which God acted, when He made man.

The old view was that God created man just in a moment, complete, and as he now is. Scholars even calculated the date at which this happened; in old Bibles you can find the year 4004 B.C. given as the date of the creation of the world, and of man in his world.

To-day many Christians hold a rather different view. The evidence of the rocks shows us that our little earth is a great deal older than used to be thought. There are many signs that it has come to its present condition by means of a long, slow process through immense periods of time. Bones and skeletons of man-like creatures have been found, dating from periods many thousands of years ago. Sometimes it is hard to tell whether these are the bones of human beings, or of higher apes, or some creature between the two. It is, then, possible that man as we know him to-day has come into being as the crowning point of a long process of development. Mind and conscience and will, and all these other qualities of which we are conscious in ourselves, did not on this view suddenly come into being in a moment. They are the full development, reached over long ages, of similar qualities that we can see in their beginnings in the animals.

Now, whichever way we look at it, there is no difference between Christians as to the thing that really matters—that it is God who has made us as we are—“it is he that made us, and not we ourselves” (Ps. 100 : 3, R.S.V. margin). Certainly it would be a more striking manifestation of God’s power, if He just said, “Be,” and man suddenly was. But might it not in the end really seem more wonderful, if ages ago God set

in motion a great process, knowing from the beginning to what it was going to lead, watching over the process through all the long ages, and in time bringing it to the fulfilment that He had planned? We know that in history God works very slowly; perhaps it is His way to work slowly in other fields as well.

All Christians are familiar with the story of Adam and Eve, as that is told us in the Book of Genesis. One of the great truths that story is meant to teach us is that all mankind is a unity. There are a great many nations of men, and they vary very much in colour, stature, way of living and habits. From time to time one race proclaims itself as the master-race, and all others as inferior to itself. Whenever this happens, the Bible rises up in condemnation, and affirms that, just as God is one, so the whole human family which He has made is also one.

Scientists cannot tell us for certain whether human beings came into existence in one place only, or whether the human race made several beginnings in different places. This is an interesting question. But, once again, the answer, if scientists are ever able to give it, does not affect any of the questions that we are concerned with in this book. What is quite certain is that the human race now is one. This can be shown in various ways:

1. All races of men, however different, are capable of mating and producing healthy offspring. This occurs to a very limited extent among the animals, as between lions and tigers. In the human race there is no limitation, though not all are agreed as to whether this interbreeding between different races is a good thing or not.

2. There is no human language which cannot be learned by men of a race quite different from that of those who speak it as their native language. Some languages are much more

difficult than others, and some individuals are much more gifted than others for the learning of languages. But there is no complete barrier, as there might be if we belonged to really different stocks, and as there is between us and all the animals. It is only in mythology that man can learn to speak or understand the language of the animals.

3. Even without speech we can to a large extent communicate by signs. This shows that our minds all work in much the same way, and that the emotions expressed by such signs as smiles and tears are common to us all.

We have not yet come to the most important question of all. If God created us, what did He create us for? The Bible answers this question in one very striking phrase—"in the image of God he created him" (Gen. 1 : 27). There is some doubt as to the exact meaning of the Hebrew words. The central point of them, however, is clear—God made man in order that man might have fellowship with God. "O God, Thou hast made us for Thyself," says a great Christian writer, "and our souls are restless, until they find rest in Thee".

Our fellowship with other human beings is mostly carried on in the form of speech. That is the Bible picture of our fellowship with God; He speaks, man can hear. Man speaks, God will hear. It is as the word of God that the revelation of God comes to man.

It is only through his relationships to other people that man becomes fully human. Through his body he is related to the world around him. But this is not enough to make him really human. Some genuine records exist concerning human children, who have been brought up among wild animals (like Kipling's Mowgli, except that these are true stories). It has been found that they had hardly any human characteristics. If they were brought back to live among men, the effort of learning to become human proved too much, and in most

cases such children have just died. It is through our relationship to other human beings from the moment of our birth that we become really human.

In such relationships, if they are really personal, we give something of ourselves, and we receive something from the other person. We must trust them enough to be willing to open ourselves to them; we must be interested enough in them to want to receive what they can give. This means that a great many of our relationships with other people are not really personal. It also means that the more we enter into truly personal relationships with others, the richer and finer our life will be.

The Bible adds another dimension. What is it that makes man really human? The answer is, the knowledge of God. Until man knows and worships the God who made him, he is still in an imperfect state. God has revealed Himself as the God who is interested in man, who is concerned about man. The whole Bible is the story of God's concern for man. Man finds his true self only when he turns away from himself, and looks up to God in gratitude and reverence.

Now, if this is true, it means that man was made in order that he might have what we have called *personal* relationships with God. This can come about only if man learns to trust God, and to open himself to God in such a way that God can come in and really be a part of man's life. Equally, it can come about only if man is interested in God, concerned to know about Him, and willing to listen to His voice. This is the true and the highest life for man; to this point we shall have to come back again and again in this book.

Here we must emphasize something else that is clear from the Bible—that God is interested in the whole of man and not just in a part of him.

We often speak of man as made up of two parts—body and

soul, and think that the part of him which has to be religious is his soul. Now it is true that the Bible does make this distinction; and later we shall find that another is added—a man is spoken of as made up of body, soul and spirit. Does this mean that we can really speak of man as made up of two or three distinct parts, of which one is lower, and the other or others higher and more divine?

Some Christians hold that we can think in this way. They point to the verse in Genesis, in which we are told that, after God had made man from the dust of the earth, He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, “and man became a living being” (Gen. 2 : 7). They have not noticed that in the same chapter a little further down (Gen. 2 : 19) exactly the same expression, “a living being”, is used of the animals. So what God breathes into Adam at his creation is just the natural life, which we share with the animals. Man becomes *a living being*. This life also is the gift of God; but this verse does not speak of one special part of man as being particularly divine.

In fact the Bible always speaks of man as a unity. The Greeks thought of man as being really a spirit, which had somehow wandered away from its true being and got imprisoned in a body. Christians sometimes have mistakenly spoken in the same kind of way. This is not really Christian thinking. Man is always a unity. He *is* body, and he *is* mind and soul; and he *can be* spirit. One of these words or another is more appropriate, according to the connection in which we may be speaking of man. By means of his body man is related to the world around him, of which he is a part. Through his mind, he becomes related to other human beings, to whom he can speak and whose thoughts he can share. He has an inner life of his own, in which he thinks and speaks with himself. This perhaps we can call his soul. But if he enters into his true life and comes to know God,

who is Spirit, then man also can rightly be called spirit, because the Spirit of the living God dwells in him.

God is interested in the whole of man. He is also interested in all men. This is the last point to be made in this chapter. If God has really made all men, then all are really equal in His sight. Men are not equal in any other way. Some are tall and others are short. Some are clever and some are stupid. Some are old and others young. But here we see the real equality of men. God has made each one of them. God is concerned about each one of them. God wants to have the love and friendship of each one of them. If I know this to be true about myself, I know that it is also true about every other man living in the world. This is what determines the attitude that I must take up towards them. I must respect every man, because I see in him the image of God. I must not try to use any other man just for my pleasure or for my own advantage. I must be concerned that every man should come to know and love God.

All this is implied in the story of the creation of man in the first two chapters of Genesis. It is not spelt out there quite so clearly as we have spelt it out in this chapter. But, if we now look back to those two chapters, we shall see that this is the foundation of the Christian answer to the question, What is man? Everything else that follows in this book is built on this foundation.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *MAN ASTRAY*

The story of the creation in Genesis ends by telling us that, when God looked on everything that He had made, He saw that it was very good (Gen. 1 : 31). We can still see a great deal of that goodness in the order and beauty of the world. The seasons come and go in regular order. The stars keep their places. But we do not have to look far in our own world, the world of men, to see that something has gone dreadfully wrong. This world too should be a place of order and happiness. Instead of that, we see men and women behaving worse than what we call the wild animals. We have lived through two world wars. We have now reached the point at which man seems to have in his hands the power to destroy the whole human race.

What is it that has gone wrong?

Look forward one chapter in the Bible, and you will find in Genesis 3 the story of how evil came into the world. The writer of this chapter has taken the old, old story of the serpent in the garden, and used it to teach us a great many things about the nature of evil. If we read the passage carefully, we shall note in it seven points that are always and everywhere true of evil:

1. It is always associated with a command, usually a command *not* to do something or other. Wrongdoing does not begin, until we are able to say "I ought" and "I ought not". At a very early age, not more than three years old at the most, children begin to understand that there are certain things they must not do, not just for fear of being punished,

but because there is a right way and a wrong way, and if everyone began to take the wrong way, life would become impossible for everyone. A boy may feel much inclined to pull his little sister's hair; but he knows quite well that, if every bigger person took out his spite on every smaller person whenever he felt like it, life would be miserable for him and everyone else.

2. Wrongdoing starts with the weighing up of the possibilities of obedience and disobedience. Eve looked at the forbidden fruit, and saw just how attractive it was. She began to think out reasons for not obeying the commandment. The command requires immediate obedience without discussion. When the possibility of disobeying has once been considered, the battle has already been more than half lost.

3. Having once gone so far, it is natural to go on, to take the easy course, to do what is forbidden. Eve perhaps has even convinced herself that to disobey will really be a good thing—it will lead to wisdom which otherwise she could not have.

4. The one who does wrong often likes to have a partner in his wrongdoing. She gave also to her husband. Why does evil spread with such frightful rapidity in society? Is it not because those who do evil take a terrible delight in leading others astray, and making them share in the evil that they themselves are doing?

5. When a man is conscious of having done wrong, the natural reactions are fear, shame and the sense of guilt. The man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God.

6. When challenged with his wrongdoing, the one who has done the wrong always tends to make excuses, and to blame someone else. It wasn't really our fault. It was all the fault of the serpent.

7. When wrong has been done and discovered, it always means that a relationship of love and trust has been injured or

destroyed. Telling a lie may seem to be a small thing. But if a child has told its parents a deliberate lie, it has injured the perfect trust that all parents would like to be able to have in their children. Man, as we saw, was made to live in fellowship with God; and now, by man's act that fellowship has been gravely injured.

Various views are held as to the way in which we should interpret this old story.

Many Christians have taken it quite literally, as telling just what happened when the first man and his mate first encountered the possibility of disobeying God's commands. Some have even gone so far as to ask what language the serpent spoke in its discussion with Eve! Many Christians now think that this is a wonderful picture of the state in which man finds himself today, divided against himself and a rebel against God. Others take it as a picture from which each of us can learn what he himself is really like. In the story of Adam and Eve we can see ourselves. This is just the kind of thing that we have done, though we would not have understood the meaning of it so clearly, unless the Bible had set it out for us in this clear pictorial way.

Whichever way we interpret the story, we are left with an unanswered question. Why did God allow it to happen? He intended the world to be good. Why did He let it go wrong in this way? Was the serpent really cleverer than God? If God could have stopped things going wrong, why did He not do so? This is a question to which perhaps we shall never be able to give a finally satisfactory answer. But we can see at least a certain number of directions in which the answer can be sought.

God wanted His children to be free. Of course we are not entirely free. A great many things have been settled for us as a result of the time and place in which we were born, and of the

kind of training that our parents gave us. Still we do have the power to say Yes and No. And when we have said Yes or No, we know that we are responsible for the decision. It was we who decided and no one else. Whatever follows from our decision, we shall have to say, That was my doing and no one else's; I, and no one else, am responsible for the consequences that followed on my act.

Now we can see clearly that, if we create freedom, we create also the possibility that the freedom can be used for a bad, or at least a foolish, purpose. If you give a child money and tell the child that it is free to spend the money in any way it likes, you create the possibility that it will buy so many sweet things that it will make itself sick. You did not plan that the child should do something wrong or silly; but you did create the opportunity. If you did so, you probably did it with the idea that the only way in which children can learn to use money sensibly is to have some of their own, and to be told that they really are free to use it exactly as they like. Your purpose was good—to help the child to grow in freedom. You took the risk of things going wrong, because that is the only possible way in which that particular good can be attained.

In the first chapter we considered that God may have other worlds in which there is life. There may be worlds in which living creatures always do what is right because they have no choice—their wills are fixed always in one direction, to do only what is good. There may be worlds in which the living creatures have freedom, and have always used it rightly and wisely. Of this we have no knowledge. We do know this of our world—that God has given His children in this world a measure of freedom, and they have not used it wisely; they have used it against their Creator and not in His service.

Man was made to live in obedience to God. But, if this is

true, does it not contradict the idea that God has really given us freedom?

In one sense, it does. If we interpret freedom as meaning that we can do just whatever we want whenever we want, there can be no obedience, and no fellowship either with God or with other people. If ever we want to do anything in fellowship with others, we always have to give up some of that kind of freedom. Even if nothing more important is involved than a game of football, the players have got to obey the rules, and that means that they cannot behave exactly as they *like*. But they can behave in exactly the way they *want*, if what they want to do is to play football. The freest man on the field is the one who knows the rules so well and keeps them so exactly that he never even has to think about them. This is a different kind of freedom, and a much more valuable one than the kind which simply means doing what you like. It makes us free to do things that are worth doing in fellowship with other people.

Man could have used his freedom in order to live in obedience to God. Then he would have found happiness. In the words of a famous prayer, he would have found that His "service is perfect freedom". Man thought he knew better. He believed that the way to happiness was to make himself independent of God. He has made himself the centre of his own world instead of keeping God at the centre; and that is the source of all his troubles. This is pride; now we can see why Christians are told that pride is the worst of sins, in fact that it is the root of all other sins.

We saw that man grows to be really human only through right relations with others. What sin does is to spoil and twist all man's relationships, and so to prevent him from being really himself, from leading a really human life. A right relationship with God is the mainspring of human life; a

wrong relationship with God is what is meant by *sin*. When that is wrong, all sorts of other *sins* can grow out of that first wrong beginning.

We can see that man's relationships have gone wrong in all directions.

The picture in Genesis is that God put man in a garden to tend it and to care for it (Gen. 2 : 15). God gives man all the good gifts of the earth, and asks that he should use them rightly and responsibly. And what does man do? To a large extent he has fulfilled God's purpose for him, in cultivating and caring for the soil. Yet at the same time he has shown a remarkable capacity for producing deserts. In many places he has recklessly cut down trees and failed to plant others. The country has become barren instead of fruitful. He has ploughed carelessly, and the rain has come and washed away the fertile soil from the hillsides, leaving them bare and useless. Man has often forgotten the law that he must put back into the soil as much as he takes out of it. Wanting to get rich quickly he has ruined the soil by which in the last resort we all live; in five years he may do harm that it will take God fifty to put right.

Man's relationship with himself is not what it should be. He was made as a unity, but he becomes divided against himself. God has given us instincts and passions. He has also given the power of thought and reflection and judgment. From very early times, man has been depicted as a chariot-driver with strong horses yoked to his chariot. It is the business of the judgment to control and direct the horses; all too often it works the other way; the horses take charge, and carry chariot and charioteer on a reckless way that may lead to destruction.

The relationship between man and his neighbour is no longer what it should be. Men and women are meant to live together on terms of mutual respect and service. Now

what we see all too often is that one thinks of the other as something that can be used for his own pleasure or profit. So, for instance, the instinct of sex, which is a gift of God, turns to evil desire; it is made to minister to man's selfishness, instead of being the hallowed means by which one can give himself to the other.

Man's life of fellowship in society is gravely threatened. In Romans 1, Paul gives a terrible picture of man under the dominion of evil. He gives a list of no less than eighteen sins, and fourteen of them refer to the kind of thing that makes it impossible for men to trust one another and live side by side in peace and friendship. Men are slanderers; they do not keep their word and their agreements. They are envious when they are down, and insolent when they are up. And he ends his list with the words "faithless, heartless, ruthless" (Rom. 1 : 31). Out of these things come war and strife, and all the evils from which we have all suffered so much of late.

When we read such a passage as Romans 1, we may be inclined to wonder whether Paul is not exaggerating. Are things really as bad as all that? Of course Paul does not mean that every single one of us is, or has done, all the things that he has listed. He does mean that, if we are quite honest and look into our own hearts, we shall see that that is the kind of people that we are. The roots of these things are there, though perhaps in our case luck or fear or good training has prevented that particular evil from growing into a thriving plant.

Let us look at what sin has done to us from another point of view.

The first thing that sin does is to blind us to the reality of what we really are. We might think that those who have committed really great crimes, such as forgery or robbery with violence, would have a very clear understanding of the evil of what they have done. Very often this is not the case. The evil they have done seems to have blunted their con-

science. It is the really good people who, when they have done something wrong, even though it may seem to others a very little thing, are heart-broken about it. We all know that we readily see evil in other people and are far less likely to see it in ourselves; that is why we can never really trust our own judgment on ourselves. We are blind to the evil that exists within us.

Secondly, sin weakens us. We say of something that presents itself as a little wrong or dangerous, "We'll try it once and no more". All too often we find that things do not work in that way, that the foot once stretched out cannot so easily be drawn back. All the world knows the power of evil habit, and how terribly difficult it is to break once it has been formed. A man ought to be master in his own house; he ought to be able to say No. All too often, we find that we have lost the power to say No.

Finally, sin corrupts. Why do we go on doing things that we know to be wrong? There can only be one answer; we go on doing them because we like doing them. Afterwards we may be sorry or ashamed or horrified; but at the time the thing that we know to be wrong presents itself as pleasant, and literally we decide to do what we like. The great William Temple summed it up in the very simple words, "I can be good if I want to: the trouble is that I don't want to". It has got to the point at which I like the things that are bad for me, and dislike the things that are good for me. It is my will itself that has been corrupted. And who is to get me out of this mess?

This is a sad picture. But is it not true? Probably you are no worse than most other people, and a great deal better than many. But is it not the case that you know from experience almost everything that has been talked about in this chapter? And is this not true of everyone else in the world?

This is the most startling thing of all. The Bible says, "None is righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3 : 10, quoting Psalm 14 : 3). Once again we may be inclined to think that there is a little exaggeration in this. But, when we begin to look round, do we not find that once again the Bible is right? If we think of the very best person we know, would we say that they never did anything wrong? Many of us are grateful for having had parents who showed us clearly what it means to live a Christian life. But are we not at the same time very well aware of their weaknesses? Is there any single person in the world who can really claim that he has never done anything wrong? As we have already noted, it actually works the other way; the people whom we would be inclined to regard as the best judge themselves most hardly; they know how very far they are from being what they would wish to be.

This is a mystery, but we seem to be compelled by the evidence to accept it as a fact. Every time a human child is born into the world, God seems to give us again a promise that He has not forsaken the race of men. Life comes into the world sweet and simple and innocent. Looking at a tiny baby, we wish that all the rest of its life could be as beautiful and innocent as the beginning. But we know perfectly well that it will not be so. Before very long the same ugly things will begin to appear in that child as we have noted in ourselves—temper, selfishness, ingratitude. And so it goes on from generation to generation. Why is this so?

There is a term which is commonly used to describe this sorrowful mystery. It is the term "original sin". This is perhaps not a very good term; but it has been used for so long that it is hardly possible now to change it. It serves to remind us that we are all caught up into a problem which is bigger than that of our own wrongdoing. We belong to a race which is shot through with evil; it is not just that this

man and that man has done what is wrong—mankind as a whole is in rebellion against God.

This has been explained in various ways.

In the past the explanation most usually given was that, when Adam first sinned, we were all still in Adam, since we are all his descendants; so we all sinned in him, and are to blame for his sin just as much as he was. Because Adam sinned, we are all guilty in the sight of God.

Then it was further explained that our human parents could only pass on to us the human nature which they had; and, since that nature in them was flawed and spoiled by sin, so must that be which they passed on to us.

About many of these problems we are more likely to say now that we really do not know, and that the Bible does not give us very much help. But two things we can perhaps usefully say.

We are all accustomed to think of ourselves as individuals. But in reality we are much more dependent on one another, and connected with one another, than we usually recognize. Each of us is descended from thousands of ancestors, from each of whom we derive something of our being. The whole human race really is a unity; everything that anyone does in some way affects all the rest of us. We may not be able to measure the effect of what we or others have done; but we are all bound together in an endless chain of actions and their consequences.

And, when we are born, we are born into a society of which all the members are sinners. Our parents have no doubt done their best to shelter us from the evil that is in the world. But from the beginning it has been playing upon us. We are influenced on deeper levels than we know by what goes on round about us. In recent years psychologists have taught us a great deal about the part that is played in our lives by these deeper and largely unconscious levels that are

present in all of us. Much of the division of ourselves against ourselves comes from conflicts that take place deep down and out of sight. In many cases we shall call these conflicts sickness rather than sin; but equally in many cases we can see that they are the result of evil that was in society about us when we were young. If not in themselves sinful, these things are the fruit of sin.

There is, then, evil in all of us. Are we to conclude that we are wholly evil, and that the whole human race is no better than what Augustine called it—a mass of perdition?

Two answers have been given to this question, with neither of which we shall be able exactly to agree.

One answer is that there is in every man a part which has never given way to sin. Some people have supposed that it was only the body which sinned, and that somehow the soul lived in a purer world untouched by sin. This is a very shallow way of looking at things; after all the poor body is only the instrument, the really serious sins such as pride and jealousy live in the mind or the soul. Others have put it much more carefully than this; they maintain that deep down in every man there is a spark of the divine life, which can be threatened by sin but can never be extinguished by it. We shall consider later whether there is any truth in this view. For the moment, we will just note against it the argument that man is always a unity. Whenever we act, it is the whole of us that acts; it is the whole of us that is responsible for what we have done. We can make divisions in words between body and mind and spirit; we can recognize that it is possible for us to say Yes and No at the same time. But, when we feel the pangs of guilt, we feel them through the whole of ourselves; we know that the whole of our being has been affected by what we have done.

The other view, which grew up by reaction against this more hopeful view, was that man was wholly evil right

through, that in him there is nothing that is not evil; that even when he most wants to do good, he can only go on sinning and adding to the mass of sin in the world. This preserves the unity of man's being. It recognizes that the word "sinner" is a comprehensive word; it does not mean one who has done a certain number of wrong things, it means one who has got into a wrong relationship with God and cannot get back into the right relationship. You are either a sinner in that sense, or not a sinner, and there is no half-way house between the two.

But this view does not take note of some things that are also realities in the world.

1. We are still able to distinguish between right and wrong. This is true of almost everyone in the world. (If someone is quite unable to understand the difference between right and wrong, he is classed as insane, and is no longer held responsible for his actions.) Not all peoples are exactly agreed as to the things that are right and wrong; but the idea is there. If men were wholly evil, would they not have lost altogether the ability to judge between right and wrong?

2. Even the non-Christian peoples have great achievements to their credit. We owe our ideas of law and justice more to the Romans than to any other people. We have all gone to school with the Greeks to learn what beauty is. Are all these things purely and solely evil?

3. But most important of all, men have never lost the desire and the longing to be free from evil. Some of the ways which men have used in the attempt to escape from evil have been very primitive and superstitious. But we meet the same desire on the highest level of art and of understanding. The greatest plays of the great Greek dramatist Aeschylus (5th century B.C.) deal exactly with this problem. He sees wrong breeding wrong in an endless cycle of guilt and suffering. He asks, Is there no way out of this? He is sure that there must be some

way out, though he cannot see clearly what it could be. Is this not clear evidence that man is at least aware of the possibility of being something other than he is? As long as this awareness is there, the darkness is not complete.

And yet, from his own resources, man is not able to find the answer. He has worked out wonderful systems of good conduct. He has striven to be better. But he cannot escape the past, his own past and the past of the race. He is like a bee or a wasp trying to climb out of a curved pot; he will reach to a certain point, and then always fall back. He continues to hope, yet the hope is always frustrated.

But the message of the Bible is not one of unrelieved gloom. It takes very seriously the state of man, more seriously than any other religious book in the world. But it affirms throughout that God has not forsaken the works of His hands. Man may at times have forgotten God, but God has never forgotten man. Man has no resources in himself to find the way out of his dilemma. But the resources of God are infinitely greater than those of man. He will find a way. So in answer to the sorrowful judgment of the Old Testament "as in Adam all die", there rings out the glorious New Testament answer, "So also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15 : 22).

## CHAPTER THREE

### *MAN SET RIGHT*

Christianity takes evil more seriously than any other religion in the world. And yet it is a religion of hope. All through the Old Testament men are given the message that, though the situation looks desperate, God has not lost control of things, and that when the right time has come He will do something that will make all things new. As the days went on, the sense of sin grew deeper and more hopeless in Israel. The people come to the prophet, and say to him, "Our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we waste away because of them; how then can we live?" (Ezek. 33 : 10.) But the answer of God comes back through the prophet: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean. . . . A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek. 36 : 25, 26). The time of waiting was very long. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, looking back over the whole period from Abraham to John the Baptist, remarks, "These all died in faith, not having received what was promised" (Heb. 11 : 13). But God's word cannot fail; what He has promised He will certainly accomplish.

So, when the time was come, God sent forth His Son, and all things were made new.

Here we must assume a number of things that have been set out in the book in this series called *Who is Jesus Christ?* And we may mention that there will be other books later on in the series on the death of Jesus Christ and on forgiveness.

This means that some things will be very briefly treated in this chapter, since arrangements have been made for fuller treatment of them elsewhere.

For what purpose did the Son of God come into the world, and what happened when He came?

In the first place, He came to live in such a way that men could see what it means really to be a man. As we have seen, this had never once happened in the world. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way" (Isa. 53 : 6). The rest of us are not really men, we are all twisted out of shape, and no more like real men than a child's drawing of a man. Now for the first time we are going to see what real manhood looks like.

We note at once that the heart and centre of the life of Jesus is God Himself. He has not come to do His own will but the will of His Father who is in heaven. Three times over He says in St. John's Gospel "Of myself I can do nothing" (John 5 : 19, etc.). If He can perform miracles, that is not because He has any special power in Himself; it is just that His will is more completely submitted to the will of God than that of any other man, and so the power of God can flow through Him as it has never flowed through any other man. He does not do things as and when He would like to do them; He must always wait for the time appointed by God. If His hour has not yet come, He will do nothing, even though it means allowing His friend Lazarus to die at a distance of two days' journey (John 11 : 6).

The surprising thing is that it is just this submission that makes Jesus free. He loves the Father as the Father loves Him, and therefore to do the will of the Father is not a heavy burden, it is like meat and drink to Him (John 4 : 34). And because He is so completely concerned about God and His purpose, He is completely free from every other concern.

He does not need to worry about what others are thinking of Him. He goes through life calmly and confidently, knowing that He has only to listen for God's voice, and that the right guidance will be given Him, when it is needed, as to what He should do and say. He knows that God will be with Him at all times, and will carry Him through everything that He has to do and to endure.

This was one purpose of His coming. But there was another. He comes to show men exactly what God is like. "He who has seen me has seen the Father," was His word to Philip (John 14 : 9). Look well on me, He seems to say, and you will learn everything that men can possibly learn of what God really is.

This is a very surprising statement. We shall not realize how surprising it is, unless we are prepared to make a considerable effort of the imagination. Let us suppose for a moment that we have never read the Gospels or heard of Jesus Christ. Someone tells us that God Himself is coming into the world to put everything right. What picture will we form in our minds of what is likely to happen? We shall probably think in terms of tremendous power, of the violent overthrow of evil, and of the sudden setting up of righteousness and peace. That, in fact, is almost exactly the way in which the Jews did think; that was the picture they had formed of the way in which God would act at the end of the days. The picture that we actually find in the record of the Gospels is very different from the expectation that men had formed of the action of God in the world.

There is power here, but there is no violence. There is authority, but it is the authority of one who has taken upon Himself the form of a servant. He Himself says to the disciples, "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22 : 27). The authority that rests on violence or on physical power belongs to the kingdoms of this world, and not to the kingdom of

God. Jesus lays down this principle not only for Himself, but for all who would follow Him.

He does not reject any who would draw near to Him. He finds His friends among the tax-gatherers and outcasts. He even stretches out His hand to touch the leper, though by doing so He makes Himself unclean by the standards of the Jewish law. This was exactly the opposite of what the Jewish teachers expected and required. They held that contact with that which is unclean defiles a man, and that therefore a religious teacher should keep himself from any kind of contact with those who could be regarded as unclean.

Jesus speaks of Himself as the good shepherd. The good shepherd is the one who goes out into the wilderness to look for his lost sheep. He does not wait for the lost sheep to come back to him. Indeed, if it is really lost, how could it come back? He goes out, if need be at the risk of his life, to find the sheep that has strayed away in the wilderness. The highest Jewish picture of God had never reached as high as this; they held that, if the sinner really repents and turns back to God, God will receive him; they had not reached to the idea that God Himself could take the initiative in the matter.

Why did Jesus act in this way? We must go back to a verse that we have already quoted: "The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing" (John 5 : 19). Jesus acts in this way because that is what He sees God doing all the time. God's own love is the pattern for the life that men are intended to live on the earth.

Jesus accepts quite calmly the fact that one who chooses to live in this way is bound to suffer. It may seem strange that it should be so. He has no ambition for Himself. He goes about doing nothing but good. Why should anyone wish to harm Him? The answer, of course, is that His teaching really is dynamite. At every point it cuts directly across the way in which the

life of men has been organized under the dominion of sin. If even a small group of people were to begin to follow His teaching quite literally, we should see a revolution bigger than anything that has yet happened in history. And some of those who lived in the days of Jesus were quite clever enough to see that this was so.

On the whole men are conservative; they want things to go on very much as they have always gone. Or they are lazy; they do not want to be challenged to a complete change in their way of living. Or they are easily frightened; they are afraid of what may happen to themselves and their own position, if such a new doctrine begins to be taken seriously.

So men united to destroy Jesus of Nazareth. And He did not lift a finger to defend Himself against them. And God did not send down legions of angels from the sky to deliver Him. Jesus gave Himself up willingly into the hands of men, and allowed them to do to Him anything that they pleased. "He who has seen me has seen the Father." Is this also something that Jesus had seen the Father doing all the time? And so in the end they killed Him. And that death was the new birth of the world.

When Jesus died, something happened that had never happened before in the whole history of the world. A man had lived the whole of his life in perfect and complete obedience to God. Death really is an end. It marks the end of the chapter. Nothing can now change what has gone before it. Through temptation and suffering Jesus has kept His spirit from anger or hate or bitterness. He has given back that spirit in its perfect purity to the Father. This was the purpose for which the world was made. This the universe had never seen, and so it had lived on through all the centuries in frustration. Now we know what the machine was made for. At last we have seen a man.

The Fourth Gospel speaks of the death of Jesus in three very remarkable ways. It is His going to the Father. It is His lifting up. It is the moment at which He is glorified. The New Testament never separates the resurrection of Jesus from His death; the two are parts of the same event. In one sense the resurrection does not add anything to the death; it only makes plain to us the inner meaning of the victory of Jesus in His life and death, and shows us what it means that one who was truly man has gone back to be with God for ever.

So here we see the three stages in the experience of the Son, as the New Testament presents them.

He was with God, in the glory which God for His love to Him had given Him before the foundation of the world (John 17 : 24).

He was with men. For our sakes, and for our salvation, He really became man. He lived a human life under exactly the same conditions as those which we know so well. He was tempted exactly as we are tempted, but never yielded to the lure of sin (Heb. 4 : 15).

He has gone back as man to be with God. The time of conflict and temptation was very real, but now it is over. "Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him" (Rom. 6 : 9). He became what we are, in order that we might become what He is.

But how? All that we have written so far might be no more than the splendid achievement of one man. But what has all this to do with us, and what place has it in a book on the nature of man?

We must go back to our earlier affirmation that the whole universe has become a new place because of the victory of Jesus Christ. St. Paul uses one expression after another to try to make clear to us what this means. Among other phrases, he speaks of Jesus as the last Adam (1 Cor. 15 : 45). A new

race of men has come into being; a new creation is already here. The first Adam became a living being. As we saw, that refers simply to the natural life which we share with the rest of the living creation. But the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. This refers to the glory which from the beginning God had intended that man should have, but which was seen for the first time in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Each of these worlds, these races, has its own character. We can sum up the nature of the old Adam thus:

the first Adam—sin—death;

whereas the nature of the new race is seen in the words:

the last Adam—righteousness—life.

In Romans 5–8, the chapters in which these ideas are specially set forth, the word “life” keeps coming back, and runs through them like a refrain. This is the true life which sin and death cannot touch. And so Paul tells us that those who have received the free gift of righteousness are destined to reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ (Rom. 5 : 17).

Paul uses also the contrast between obedience and disobedience, between righteous act and trespass. By one man’s disobedience many were made sinners. This does not mean that in Adam everyone actually sinned. The word “righteousness” often means “doing the right thing” or “being in the right relation”. When sin came in, as we have already seen, the relation which was meant to exist between God and man was spoiled. When one man lived a life of perfect righteousness, that lost relation was restored, not only for him, but for the whole of the new human race of which he is the first man and the head.

So here are two human races. One looks back to the first Adam, and throughout it is in a wrong relationship to God. And here is the other race, of which Christ is the head, which stands in a right relationship to God, and in which therefore true humanity can be realized. We belong by our birth to the

first human race, with all its inheritance of sin and sorrow. Can we become members of the other race, with the promise of freedom and fulfilment, and, if so, how?

The New Testament answer seems too simple to be true. "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16 : 31). "He who hears my word and believes him who sent me . . . does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life" (John 5 : 24). It is simple, but this does not necessarily mean that it is easy. Faith in Jesus is not just something that the mind does. It does not mean just saying "Yes" to certain ideas that are put before us. It is an act of the whole man. When it is real, it produces effects inside us rather like those of an atom bomb.

It involves, first, really accepting the picture of God that Jesus has given us in His life and in His death. This picture is quite different from any that we could possibly form for ourselves.

Then it involves learning that there is only one way by which we can pass from the old human nature to the new—that is by dying and being raised again out of death. The death of Christ is not simply something that was done for us. It is something that has to happen in us. Paul tells us that he too has been crucified with Christ (Gal. 2 : 20). Faith in the New Testament always has to do with death and resurrection. This is not easy to understand; in order to make it plain, let us first look at the picture which Jesus Christ Himself has given us of what it means to believe in Him.

What happens when we are baptized? The only kind of baptism many readers of this book will have seen is the sprinkling of a few drops of water on the head of a baby in Church. But some will have seen, and some may have experienced, a very different kind of baptism. It is a wonderful thing to share in the baptism of grown-up converts in India or Africa. In the church which I served, the Anglican

Church in India, this can of course be done in the church building with a little water in the font. But, whenever possible, we arranged for such a baptism to take place by immersion in a lake or river. Then each candidate goes down into the water with the one who is baptizing him. He is plunged three times under the water, buried in it so that he disappears completely from the eyes of those who are watching on the bank. Then he comes up again out of the water, with a new name, to stand with those who have already been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

When baptism is carried out in this way, its real meaning is made perfectly clear. The primary meaning is not cleansing. Baptism is a real death, and a real rising again. "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6 : 4).

If there is a real death, what is it that has died? It is I myself. It is that self, which in its pride has organized itself in independence of God and in rebellion against Him. And does it want to die? It clings to life with the fury of despair. It is prepared to go to any length, to make any kind of compromise with God, if only it can be let off dying. That is why it is so hard to be converted; that is why we must never lightly use the expression "faith in Jesus Christ". It is always literally a matter of life and death. There is no other way. There is no way to be saved, unless that rebel self recognizes and accepts as just God's sentence of death upon it and is willing to die. That is the first word of God. But it is not the last. Jesus died and rose again. We are called to trust in a God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist (Rom. 4 : 17). Such life can be received only as a gift from God; it can be lived only in complete dependence on Him.

This is the real Copernican revolution in human life. In

old days men believed that our little world was the centre of the universe. When Copernicus came along and suggested that that was not true, that the earth moves and the sun stands still, his contemporaries found it very hard to believe. It upset all their established ideas about the universe. In the same way the Gospel upsets all our ideas about ourselves. We have thought that the only way to be free was to be independent of God; and look what a mess we have made of everything! The Gospel tells us that the only way to be free is to abandon our freedom and to come back to the rule of God.

This new freedom will manifest itself in various ways.

1. First, the new man in Christ is free from his own past. This is what it means when we say that he is forgiven. He has passed beyond the reach of those causes which in the past have determined all his actions. He is in the new creation; the past may serve as a warning, but it can no longer imprison him or hold him fast. Only one condition is laid down for the enjoyment of this freedom. The one who would be forgiven must be willing to forgive (Mark 11 : 25). This is not difficult to understand. When our relationship with God went wrong, our relationship with all men went wrong. When we get back the right relationship with God, we shall want the same rightness to exist in our relationship with all other men. If we have done them wrong, we shall want to ask their pardon; if they have done us wrong, we shall want to draw them back into the fellowship of love.

2. The new man is free to achieve what formerly had proved itself to be out of his reach. A new power is now at work within him, creating new motives and releasing new powers. For this he can find no words, except the phrase first used by Paul—"Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2 : 20).

3. The new man is free from dependence on the good opinion or approval of other men. He now stands in a direct

relationship to God, from whom alone he receives his orders, and to whose judgment alone he feels himself amenable. The fear of men is always a bitter enemy of true freedom; until it is cast out, none of us can be genuinely free.

4. But, as we have seen in the case of Jesus Christ, this freedom always finds its expression in taking on it the form of a servant. The Christian, in principle, is no one's master and everyone's servant. Even though he should find himself sitting on a throne, his business is to make himself the servant of his people.

5. If this lesson has been learned, the new man will be without personal ambition. The natural man naturally wants to get to the top, and to have everything under his control. The new man asks nothing for himself except the freedom to serve.

6. The new man can never regard anyone as outcaste or as rejected. He lives all the time in the miracle of his own acceptance by God in Jesus Christ. He has not been rejected; therefore he has no right to reject anyone else. It cannot be said that Christians have always lived up to this principle, which is implicit in their creed. Yet it is just the fact that on the whole Christians have done more for lepers, for the insane, and for other groups that society has tended to cast out, than anyone else.

7. The new man is moved all the time by the desire that other men should find the secret which he has found. He is not allowed to despise other men. But he cannot but be grieved that they should go on so sadly contented with an unreal life, missing the glorious reality of life that he has been privileged to find. Witness to others is not an extra in the Christian life; where there is no witness we may be very doubtful whether there is any real life. Missions are not an extra in the life of the Church; they *are* the life of the Church.

The old always persecutes the new. This is a principle that

seems to run all through history. No new idea has ever been gladly received by men. No prophet has ever been made welcome except by a small group of disciples. Jesus Christ was hated and destroyed. He warned His disciples that what had happened to Him would happen to them too (John 15 : 18; 16 : 2). This is hard to bear. The Christian has no desire except to do good to others. Why should they turn and injure him? We can only answer that that is the way the old world is made. The new life that he is trying to lead is a rebuke and a challenge to those who wish to live a different life. They will welcome neither him nor his message.

So the new life is one in which joy and suffering are mixed. As long as this world lasts, this is the only way in which happiness can be sought. Jesus left us evidence of this in one of the very few things that He has left behind, the ordinance of Holy Communion. This is an occasion of joy, because there those who have believed in Him meet the One in whom they have believed. But what are they there for? They have come to meet One who was willing to die for them. They have no right to be there unless they are willing to die for Him. In the old bad days in Rome, the gladiators in the arena used to greet the emperor with the cry, *Morituri te salutant*, Those who are about to die salute you. This might well be regarded also as the watchword of the new life in Christ. But there is a difference; the Christian knows that death and resurrection are not two separate things; he has encountered them both in his experience of meeting with Jesus Christ, and he knows that in no circumstances can death be the end for one who is privileged to share both in the death and the resurrection of his Lord.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *THE NEW FELLOWSHIP*

In our last chapter we were talking mostly about the individual, and the way in which he comes to meet God and to enter into new life. That chapter could not be written in any other way. There are certain things that we have to do for ourselves, and no one else can do them for us or even help us to do them. It is, of course, true that none of us is ever an individual and nothing more; we depend on other people for a great many things. Doubtless, most of the readers of this book were born into Christian families. Before they knew anything about it, their parents may have brought them to Church to be baptized into Christ or to be dedicated to Him. From early years they learned about Him. All this is a tremendous privilege. But it does not alter the fact that sooner or later each of us comes to the point at which we have to say "Yes" or "No" to God with the whole of our being. In this sense I am responsible for myself, and no one else can be responsible for me.

If I have said "Yes" to God with the whole of my being, I have entered into a new relationship with Him. But that means also that I have entered into a new relationship with a great many other people as well, in fact with all God's children, both those who are now living and those who have gone before us into the world of light.

It is part of God's purpose that we should live not alone but in fellowship with others.

This purpose goes right back to the beginning of things. In those early chapters of Genesis, which we have used so

often already as a guide to our understanding of ourselves and of God's purpose for us, we read God's word about man, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2 : 18). So God gives to the first man the mate who is to complete his existence. A man living alone is not a complete man; God gives marriage and the family as the means by which we can learn our first lessons in the meaning of love and of responsibility for others besides ourselves. This is God's will for us. Every one of us belongs to a number of societies. Perhaps the fullness of man's life is seen in the number of societies he belongs to, and the use that he makes of his membership in them. Some of these societies are given to us without our having any say in choosing them—the family into which we are born, the nation of which we are citizens by birth. Other societies we can choose for ourselves—clubs, groups, fraternities and all the rest.

We said in the last chapter that what God did through Jesus Christ was to bring a new human race into existence. In many ways this new human race is different from the old; but in a great many things it follows the same rules. Here too it is not God's will that we should live alone. The moment we become Christians, we become part of a society. A great many words are used in the New Testament to describe this society. It is "the people"—that is a word that means "nation". It is "the Church"; the Greek word meant originally "the citizens of a city in regular assembly". Paul tells us that we are like a "colony" on earth (Phil. 3 : 20); the city of which we are now citizens is not here, it is elsewhere; we are just passing through this world, and here we specially belong to one another because we are strangers in a country which is not our own. Sometimes the simple word "family" is used; and of course every group of Christians worshipping together in the same church building ought to be just like one large family.

Every society however small has to have some rules. But Jesus told His disciples that He was going to give them only one rule, and that, if they understood that one rule correctly, they would find that it included everything that they needed to know. "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13 : 35). In the kingdom of Christ, the new world of men, there can be no other law, no other rule. The Apostle makes clear to us the meaning of this law: "Through love be servants of one another" (Gal. 5: 13). The Lord Himself had taken on the form of a servant. He had said that in the midst of His disciples He was as the one who serves. That is the example that is to be followed by all in His kingdom.

Love is something that we know even before the revelation of Christ. Men and women who have never heard of Him love their children. That is one of the signs to us that, sinful as the human race has become, God has not forsaken it. But this natural love needs to be raised to a higher level. Often there is a selfish element in human love. Parents sometimes love their children because they feel the children to be in a real sense part of themselves. Sometimes we love others for the sake of what we may hope to get from them. This will not pass as love in Christ's kingdom.

In fact we may say that love as Jesus understands it goes directly contrary to a number of things that are present in us all, and which we regard as quite natural. We tend to like or to love those who are attractive, or have loved us first. We all want to get to the top, and to be able to impose our will on others. The strongest instinct in all of us is to keep ourselves alive, even though it may be at the expense of others. Love, as Jesus understood it, directly denies all these three instincts. It loves even those who are unattractive and is even prepared to repay hatred with love. It never tries to make itself superior to anyone; it is willing to be the servant of all.

It is willing to lay down its life for others, if that is the highest way in which they can be served. All these things we see in Jesus Himself. This is the kind of love which He has declared to be the law for His kingdom.

If the new fellowship really lived according to this law, it ought to be the most wonderful place in all the world. Everyone would love and serve everyone else. In that fellowship no one would ever need to be lonely or afraid. All the strength and all the wealth of each would be available for all the rest. Unfortunately we know that the Church of Jesus Christ is not very much like that; it ought to be the wonderful world of the new race of men; usually it looks much more like the old world of sin and death, from which it is supposed to have been freed.

This is a real problem. We have said, as the Bible teaches, that those who have believed in Jesus have moved out of the old world, that they have died to it and have been set free. Why then are they still sinful, and why does so much of the old world seem to cling to them? The answer is that we have to think in terms of three great periods of God's dealing with the race of men. There was the long period of sin and death. Jesus entered into the world in this period, accepted all its evil and suffering, and died because of the sins of men. Then, at the end of time, there will be the perfection of God's purpose, when sin and death and suffering have been done away, and we are finally freed from the burden of the past. And there is the period in between, when the old world and the new exist together. Because Jesus has risen from the dead, the new world is already in existence. By faith we belong to it. But the old world of evil is still very much there. It touches us at every point, and we are not yet free from it. As long as these two worlds exist together, there will be conflict between them. We see this in the life of Jesus. In Him the new world came into the old. The old hated Him and killed Him. Is it

surprising that, if we belong to the new world and try to live according to its laws, the old world will hate us too?

Even if this is true, it does not seem to answer our anxious question. If we have really believed in Christ and been baptized, why are we then not perfect? Have we really passed from death to life, if so much of death still seems to cling about us?

God's promises are true. We must firmly believe that we really are living in the new world, that we really are part of the new race of men. But we have to learn to live in that new world, and we do not find it easy. In fact this lesson will never be perfectly learned, as long as we are in this life. We can make this plain by two illustrations. A man has been ill for a long time. Now the fever has left him, and he is perfectly well. But because he has been ill so long, a great deal of his strength has left him. He gets up and begins to walk. But his legs hardly seem to belong to him. They go off in directions of their own, and not in the way in which he wants them to go. A man has for a long time been prisoner in a dark dungeon. One day he is suddenly set free. For years he has not seen the light of the sun. At first he is completely blinded, he cannot see anything. It is only gradually that his eyes become accustomed to the light and able to bear it. During the years in prison he has not had to make any decision. Everything has been settled for him by his keepers; he has had to do just what he was told, and never had any need to think for himself. Now that he is out, he has to make all kinds of decisions; he has to plan his own life. In the meantime the world has changed, and he finds himself at a great many points out of touch with the world as it now exists all round him. He is bound to be perplexed, and to make a great many mistakes as he becomes accustomed to the new life of freedom.

The change that comes about when we believe in Christ is

much greater than the change from sickness to health, and from prison to freedom. Is it really surprising that it takes time for the Christian to learn how to live the new life, and that he makes endless mistakes in trying to live it? Two things make it difficult to live in the new way. We can understand these most easily, if we think of a man who has just come out of some non-Christian religion, and who has to learn the meaning of the Christian life from first principles.

The first difficulty comes from habit. We have been used to living in a certain way; we do a great many things almost without thinking about them, and the longer the habit has been established, the more difficult we find it to be free of it. Our new convert has always been used, on coming back to his house, to make a detour in order to avoid passing too close to a certain tree, which is believed to be the home of an evil spirit. Now that he is a Christian, he knows that, whatever evil spirits may exist in the world, they no longer have any power over him. And yet time and again he will find that his feet, of themselves, carry him off on the accustomed detour, and perhaps deep down in his mind something of the old fear of the evil spirit still persists. Through faith a new self has been born; it takes years before that new self can grow from infancy to Christian manhood.

The other difficulty comes from those who are outside the faith. Our convert has given up all contact with the worship of evil spirits. But when he hears the drums beat for worship at the idol shrine, they beat their rhythms through his brain and through his blood; he knows just what they mean, and without his wishing it the old pulls him back with tremendous power. If he is not careful, one day the old will pull a little too strongly; he will go back to the idol shrine "just to look on"; but, when he has got there, perhaps he will find that he does a great deal more than merely look on. Of course a Christian ought not to do such things; but

the old is there, it draws us, and there is something inside us that responds to its drawing even when we are Christians.

We can see this very clearly in the case of the new convert. But in principle the life of every Christian is exactly the same. He has to live in the midst of people who are untouched by the new principles of life that he has accepted; they will tell him that the important thing in life is to get to the top, to make a lot of money, to enjoy the pleasures of the world. It is only by continuous effort that we remember that we have learned to live by different standards and that the principles of the world are not for us.

If this is true of the individual, it is equally true of the whole fellowship of the Church.

A group of people cannot be better than the individuals who make up the group. The Church, as we see it, is made up of very mixed types of people. There are those who came into the Church by chance, just because their parents happened to be Christians, but who have never made any personal choice to be members of it. Others started out well, and then got tired of the effort of really trying to follow Christ. Others stay in the Church but make a complete separation between their faith and their ordinary lives, so that one does not affect the other. So when people outside the Church look at it, it does not seem to them very much different from other societies that they know, and they wonder what all this talk about "new birth" and "the new race of men" really means.

But that is not the end of the story. Even those who are really trying to follow Christ do not find it easy to follow Him perfectly, and so the old sins tend to follow us into the best and most perfect groups of Christians in the world. As we have seen, one of our deepest desires is to get to the top. That can happen even among Christians. One man wishes to be elected to a position of leadership, such as must

exist even in the Church. If he has very much set his heart on it and is not chosen, he may easily become resentful, and no one who is resentful can love his neighbour as himself. Or, if he is chosen, someone else who desired the same position may be jealous; and the man who is jealous cannot love his neighbour as himself.

The Church lives in the midst of the world, and, try as it will, it cannot completely separate itself from the sin of the world. A great many workers are still paid less than their work has honestly earned. How do I know that the very clothes I am wearing were not made by someone who is oppressed and underpaid? A nation goes to war. War is always the result of sin, though often we cannot say whose sin it is that brought about the war. The Church did not desire the war. But can it be sure that it did not in some way contribute to the breaking out of the war? Was it all the time completely free from selfishness? Was its witness in the cause of peace always completely clear and courageous? All too easily we become involved in compromise, and so become partakers in the sin of the world in which we live.

Is it right, then, to speak of the new race of men, the Church, as *holy*? Certainly; but we must understand what the word means in the Bible.

In the first place, it means "set apart". In this sense the Church already is holy. Once for all God has chosen it for Himself, set it apart from the world, and set His mark upon it. In this sense the Church, and we as members of it, have been made holy once and for all. From that God will never draw back, neither must we.

We look forward in hope to the time when struggle will be over, and we shall be free to be what today we long to be—wholly devoted to God, able to give all that we have and all that we are to His service.

In between, we are the Church which is learning to be

oly; learning to be in practical reality what we already are by God's calling and His gift. As Paul tells us, we are *being renewed* according to the image of the One who has created us, that is Jesus Christ (Col. 3 : 10). This is going to take a long time, and in this life the process will never be completed.

That is why the Church is a body of worshipping men and women. In the first chapter, we noted that one of the ways in which man differs from the animals is that he prays, and as far as we know the animals do not. This is one of the things that makes us really human. The more truly human, and that means the more like Jesus Christ, we become, the more we shall wish to pray and worship. Worship does not mean simply reciting a certain number of prayers and listening to a sermon. There are three elements that must always be present in it.

1. In the first place, man tries with God's help to put himself back into the right relationship with God; that, as we have seen, is a relation of total dependence, obedience and gratitude. Having once been brought by Christ into that relationship, we ought never to slip out of it. All the time we are slipping out of it, and therefore we always have to come back to God in penitence, asking for forgiveness. The Church is a body of penitent men and women.

2. Secondly, worship is always a time of looking directly at Jesus Christ, both as He was in His earthly life, and as He now is in glory. He has given us no detailed commands as to how we are to live, but He has shown us in a whole life what it means to live the life of love. We do not follow any vague ideal; as we look at Him, we are transfigured after the same image (2 Cor. 3 : 18). This is why the Holy Communion has always been a central part of Christian worship—in it we come to meet Jesus Christ, and to receive Him into our lives.

3. Thirdly, we open ourselves to God, for Him to say to us

what we need to hear, to change in us what we ourselves cannot change. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, the *Creator Spirit*.

The process of becoming holy will never be finished in this life.

What can we hope for, as a result of God's work in us, and of our efforts to be loyal to Him?

We may hope that in time we shall come to look at least in some degree like what God intends us to be, that in part at least the signs of the new man will be seen in us.

The word "saint" is used in a number of senses, most of them incorrect. Some people think that a saint is one who no longer feels any temptations. That certainly cannot be true. The best man in the world could easily slip into the temptation of feeling rather pleased with himself, just because he is so good; and that would be enough to undo all his goodness. Some people imagine that the saint has got to the point where he can no longer sin. If we read the records of the lives of really good people, they do not bear out any such idea. The very best Christians tell us that life is conflict right up to the very end. Perhaps the sins that these really good people regard as serious might seem to us very small; all the same they are a reminder that we are never going to be perfect, and that that is not the sense in which we should use the word "saint". Some people think that a saint is one who can do miracles. Perhaps they are right. But, if so, ninety-nine out of a hundred miracles wrought by the saints will be of that unseen kind which no one knows about except God—the wonderful things that are wrought by the prayers and the influence of those who live every day near to God.

But really what the word "saint" means in Christian speech can be put quite simply. A saint is one who makes you think of Jesus Christ. One of the volumes in this series deal-

with the life and witness of the Indian Christian Sadhu Sundar Singh. I once heard a rather effusive woman say of him "Sadhu Sundar Singh, a wonderful man, exactly like Jesus Christ." I am not sure whether the Sadhu, who was a man of real humility, would have been quite pleased to hear this description of himself; he knew too well the gap that separated him from his Saviour. But we know what the good lady meant. And perhaps every one of us can think of Christian men and women for whom we thank God every time that we remember them, because they made plain to us, by what they were and what they did, what it means to be transformed after the likeness of Jesus Christ. Each one of us may hope that, if we are loyal and true to what we know, that may come to be true of us also. In this life we shall not be perfect; but we can show forth something of Jesus Christ.

The Church will never be perfect, whether we are thinking of the whole Church throughout the world, or of the particular Christian group in which we worship. But every such group, if it works hard at its task, can come to show some of the signs of the new human race, of the new world. I was once writing to a friend, and I started by saying, "I am writing from a place in which they really love one another". This friend had been called to give an important series of lectures on the doctrine of reconciliation through Christ. He started his first lecture by saying that everything he had to say was really included in this one sentence from my letter. I was writing from a place in which, in a peculiar degree, men and women of many races, a number of whom were not Christians at all, found themselves bound together by a simple and transparent Christian charity. It was something that everyone felt, though it was by no means easy to explain or to define.

There is not very much love in our hard and troubled world. When men encounter Christian love of that kind, they know that the new world is already here. Such an

experience persuades them, better than a thousand sermons, that the Gospel is true, and that in Jesus God has revealed the purpose for which the universe was made. That purpose was the manifestation of the love of God.

But love always flows out beyond itself. In this chapter we have been writing about the fellowship of Christians among themselves, and of what with God's help they can do for one another. But, if the Church is concerned only about itself, it will soon cease to be the Church of Jesus Christ. It is written of Him that He died for sinners. The Church must have that warm, true fellowship within itself; it is only in such a fellowship that we can grow to be truly human. But the Church will die, if it tries to keep that fellowship for itself. It exists in the first place for those who are still outside the fellowship. In the next chapter we must consider how the Church, following the One who took on Him the form of a servant, can make itself the servant of the whole human race.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *MAN IN SOCIETY*

So far we have been thinking of the life of men in the Church. But man cannot live only in the Church. As we have seen, he also is a member of many groups and societies, which are not organized on the same principles as the Church. All about us is the world. How is the Christian to think of the world, and in what relationship to it should he regard himself as standing?

We shall notice that in the Bible “the world” is spoken of in two different ways, and that these stand in sharp contrast to one another. When God made the world in the beginning, He looked on it and saw that it was all very good (Gen. 1 : 31). In the New Testament we read that God loved the world (John 3 : 16). Yet we are also given the solemn warning that “friendship with the world is enmity with God” (Jas. 4 : 4); we are told that what is in the world is “the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life”, and that therefore we must not “love the world or the things in the world” (1 John 2 : 15–16). How are we to understand this contrast?

In the first place, we must not make the mistake of identifying the world with the body, and thinking that it is evil just because it is physical and material. That was the error of many Christian heretics, especially the Gnostics. They taught that matter is evil in itself, and that the body is like an evil prison in which the soul is held captive. This is not Christian doctrine. God made the body, and He made it good; it can be used for evil purposes, but it can also be the dwelling-place

of the Holy Spirit, and the servant of God for all good purposes (1 Cor. 6: 19-20).

No, the world in the sense in which the Bible condemns it is the world in which men forget God. The wonderful story of the tower of Babel in Genesis (11 : 1-9) tells us in a few verses exactly what is meant. Men want to have a permanent home. They want to be great and make a name for themselves. And they forget that they are dependent on God. So they become makers of idols. The idols that cannot be seen are far more dangerous than the idols that can be seen. The idols of the world are power, and wealth, and fame, and reputation, and security. God is not interested in any of these things. In so far as men are organizing themselves on the basis of these things, they are putting themselves into a state of enmity with God. This does not mean that all human societies are evil, or that any are wholly evil; it does mean that man is not just a sinner as an individual, but that he can create societies which are touched by sin at their heart, and can multiply and increase sin in everything that they do.

St. Augustine in the fifth century wrote a wonderful book called *The City of God*. It is a tremendous study of the two kingdoms, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man, which exist together all through history. The foundation of the kingdom of man is pride, and the foundation of the kingdom of God is humility. We cannot say that the Church is always the kingdom of God on earth; it too can become terribly corrupted with pride. And even among the kingdoms of men, in so far as they love and seek after justice, we can see traces of the kingdom of God. But for the most part the Church has tried to maintain the divine law of humility; and that is why all through history it has found itself in opposition to other forms of human society, which in one way or another are based on human pride and self-sufficiency.

At times Christians have felt this opposition to be so

extreme that they have despaired of the world; it is so hopelessly evil that the best thing for the Christian is to have as little to do with it as possible. So thousands of men and women streamed out of the cities and the villages to live in the desert as monks and hermits, believing that this was the only true Christian life, and the only way in which a man could be sure that his soul would be saved. We may well believe that God does give to certain Christians such special vocations, that He calls them to leave everything and to live away from the world and for God alone. But, if some do accept this vocation, it must still be for the sake of the world and not for their own sake. By praying without ceasing for the world, they can be rendering what is perhaps the highest of all forms of service; if they forget the world and become too much interested in themselves, they may fall into a kind of spiritual selfishness which is much worse than most of the other sins that men can commit.

In any case, most of us are not called to live such a life. We live in close contact with the world outside the Church. We may live as citizens of a nation in which only two or three per cent are even nominally Christian. Or we may live in a nation where almost everyone has been at least baptized. But, whatever our particular situation, we are all brought constantly into touch with others to whom the Christian faith means little or nothing. Whether we like it or not, we are members of groups and societies which make no claim to be in any sense Christian. What is to be our attitude towards them?

Our answer is given in the New Testament. "God so loved the world. . . ." There is our example. We too must love the world which God loves. Of course this does not mean that we are called on to approve of the world, to accept its standards, to be friends of the world, in the sense which St.

James condemns. No doubt God did not approve at all of the world that had fallen under the dominion of sin. But He loved it enough to die for it in the person of His Son, in order that its sin might be taken away, and that it might be brought back to Him. Every person in the world to-day lives in a world that has been redeemed by Christ. He may know nothing of this; he may know, and yet care nothing about it. For all that, he lives in a world which God has not forsaken, to which God has bound Himself forever by the death of His Son.

What then can the Church do for the world which is not yet subject to the will of God?

1. The most important thing of all is that the Church should just be itself. It is called the body of Christ. It is supposed to be a society which lives by principles quite different from those of the world. If it does live by those principles, it challenges and judges the world by showing it a kind of life quite different from that which the world wants to have for itself. A burning bush. That was the sign under which God showed Himself to Moses (Ex. 3 : 2). The bush burned, and yet it was not consumed. That should be the sign of the Church all through the ages. Since it is the Church of Jesus Christ, who was meek and lowly, it should never ask anything for itself, it should never cling to any privilege. It must expect to be rejected, as He was, and to suffer as He suffered. But, if the living Jesus lives within it, like the burning bush it cannot be consumed.

All too often, the Church does not live its own true life. It has claimed privileges for itself at the expense of others. At one time clergy of the Church did not have to pay taxes like their fellow-citizens. For centuries they could not be brought to trial in the ordinary law-courts of the land. And, once a privilege has been won, it is hard to persuade the Church to give it up, or to see how bad such things are for its own life.

2. The second great service that the Church can render to the world is to preach the Gospel to it. That is what the Church exists for—in order that the good news of God in Jesus Christ may be preached to every creature.

Can human nature change? The question is often asked, and no certain answer can be given to it. We can only say that it seems to remain very much what it always was. We have books that were written three thousand years ago. Judging by what we read in them, the men and women of that time seem to have been remarkably like ourselves. Of course it is possible that, if the world lasts for a million years and the human race continues to live on it, things may get slowly better and better—or they might get slowly worse and worse. We really do not know. But as Christians we believe that human nature can *be changed*. As long as men stand in a wrong relationship to God, they will be what they have always been in history. Man will go on being wolf to man. What he needs is to be changed at the very heart of his being, and nothing can bring that about except the restoration of his true relationship to God.

Is this not a very pessimistic view? It is neither optimistic nor pessimistic. It looks at the plain facts. The Christian believes in progress, but he believes only in one kind of progress—that which comes about as the Gospel is preached from one end of the earth to the other, and as men and women of every nation are brought into the fellowship of the new human race, which was our subject in the last chapter.

In the early days the Christians saw that this was their duty, and bent all their strength to carrying it out. Since then, most Christians have forgotten this; many of them, if asked what the Church is for, would not be able to give the right answer, that the Church is there to “declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2 : 9).

3. Whenever suffering or disaster falls on any part of the human race, Christians should be the first in the field to render help and service.

Here the record of the Church is better, and we can point to a great many instances in which Christians have known how to make themselves servants of those who are in need. During the terrible days in 1947, when hundreds of thousands of people were killed in civil strife in India, the Christians were among the first to come forward to serve; and just because they were trusted by both Hindus and Muslims, they were able to render service such as no one else could give. In the long agony of the refugees since the war, Christians have carried on a service, which for patience and generosity will rank with anything that has ever been seen in the history of the world.

So far we have spoken of what might be called professional Christian service. We must go on to think of the kind of service that ordinary Christians living in the world can render to the secular societies of which they form part.

Let us repeat that, from the Christian point of view, these societies are not wholly evil. The New Testament recognizes that the ruler, whoever he may be, is also a servant of God (Rom. 13 : 1, 4). God is a God of order (1 Cor. 14 : 33), and any kind of order is better than complete disorder. The ruler, in so far as he cares for justice among men, is carrying out the will of God. The state also is part of God's good will for men. Of course the Christian can never give a total and undivided loyalty to the state; his first loyalty is always to the kingdom of God. He must retain the freedom to criticise in the name of God and His word even the nation to which he is loyal. Most of the time this causes no trouble. But the case can arise (as we see by contrast in Rev. 13), in which the state puts itself in the place of God and refuses to admit that there can be any loyalty higher than loyalty to itself. This is

what many Christians judged to have happened in Hitler's Germany; it seemed that the only right course for them was to resist the state, and many of them endured bonds and death in consequence.

Except in this extreme case, Christians ought to be happy to serve the state. Since they believe themselves to have learned in the Church the true nature of the life of men in fellowship, they ought to understand better than the state and the politicians the true principles of political action.

1. The Church is the true United Nations. It is a worldwide body, which refuses to admit the superiority of any one race or group to any other.

2. It understands the true principle of human equality. We are all equal, because God cares for us all alike.

3. It believes that all men should share in responsibility for the life of the society in which they live. In the Church the Holy Spirit is given to all, not only to the clergy. The voice of God may speak through the least of the members, and all should share in responsibility for the welfare of the Church. In no other way can men grow up to full responsible manhood. The Church can exist under any form of political government; but Christians who believe in the reality of the gift of the Holy Spirit are likely to think that true democracy comes nearer to the Christian ideal than any other form of government; more than any other it trains men to be grown-up and responsible beings.

4. It is the business of the Church to remind the ruler that he is a servant and nothing else. Power, if exercised as power, is always harmful. It ceases to harm, if it is turned into an opportunity for the service of others.

5. The Church has learned, slowly and only after itself making many mistakes, that the health of a society can be maintained only if all are free to think their own thoughts and to express their own ideas. We can produce conformity

by other means; there are no other means by which we can produce conviction.

6. The Church has been taught that, if one member suffers, all suffer together (1 Cor. 12 : 26). What does harm to any Christian injures the whole life of the Church. The same is true of any other society. If one class is oppressed, excluded from privilege, treated worse than the rest of society, it is the whole society that will suffer, and not just the oppressed part.

Now if Christians have understood these principles of the life of men in society, there are certain causes that they ought always to be ready to champion (history shows that they have not always understood or applied the principles).

1. For instance, they ought to work for the acceptance of the principle that the rights of men and women in society are equal. In some countries where divorce is permitted, it is far harder for a wife to divorce a faithless husband than for a husband to divorce a faithless wife. Christians would prefer that there should be no divorce at all; but, if it is permitted, such inequality between husband and wife is obviously wrong.

2. Christians must stand up for the principle of equal opportunity in education for all. This does not necessarily mean that all children should have the same kind of education; it does mean that the door of opportunity should not be wide for some and narrow for others.

3. Christians, following the example of their Master, must be concerned about the protection of the young. All Christians, whatever their views about the use of alcoholic liquor for themselves, probably welcome laws which make it an offence to sell or give such liquor to a young person under the age of eighteen.

On a great many other matters, Christian duty is not nearly so clear. Of course all Christians must be in favour of

peace among men. This does not mean that they will necessarily favour all political propaganda in favour of peace. They may well be agreed that the important thing is to seek out and remedy the causes of war; but it is not always easy to know what those causes are, and what should be done about them. Here even Christians may legitimately disagree.

But now comes the crucial question—if Christians have such ideas about the will of God for man and about the right life of men in society, what are they to do about it? Here once again we can give only certain hints and indications; the conditions under which Christians live vary so much from country to country that no general statement will be true for all; each must learn to use the opportunities provided by the situation in which he lives.

Our first aim must be the education of the public conscience. We cannot expect those who are not Christians to act as though they were Christian, and we cannot expect them to share all our beliefs about the nature of man. But we may hope that it will be possible to help them to see more clearly than they now do that certain things are right and other things are wrong, even though they may not understand the deeper reasons on which our Christian convictions are based. Christians ought to use every means at their disposal to spread the right ideas and to combat the wrong ones. If they have the opportunity to use the public press, as journalists or correspondents, to speak on the radio, or to use other forms of publicity, these should constantly be used as means to educate the mind of the public. We are not here speaking of direct preaching of the Gospel—in many countries that would be impossible by such means; we are speaking of a less direct, but still important service.

We must not forget that non-Christians can do things that are good and well-pleasing to God. For countless centuries,

one-sixth of the population of India was reckoned as outcaste and untouchable; now the government of India has abolished untouchability by law. This does not mean that all the problems have been solved, or that all the old evils have been done away. It is a great thing that the old injustice has been thus publicly condemned. And where did the inspiration for this good and right action come from? It came from the teaching of Mr. Gandhi, and Mr. Gandhi had learned a great deal from the New Testament and from his Christian friends.

If Christians are to help to educate the public conscience, they must be alert to what is happening in the world. They must know the facts about the evils which they wish to combat. They must try to have a practical programme for putting things right. This is not possible without careful study; and such careful study springs only from a really deep concern that things should be better than they are.

Christians must not hesitate to accept responsibility in the affairs of their community and nation, if the opportunity is given them. In some countries this is hardly possible, but in increasing measure it is as possible for Christians as for anyone else to become members of local councils, or even members of Parliament. Sometimes in the past Christians have hesitated to accept such posts, not being sure whether the service rendered in them could really be regarded as the service of God. Clearly not every Christian is suited for such a career, and not all who are suited will be able to find leisure to pursue it. But our aim should be that Christians should be found, as far as possible, in every part of every society, to be there as God's witnesses, if possible directly, if not indirectly, to God's purpose for man, and to the kind of society in which man can live according to the will of God.

Any Christian, who is going to serve in such ways, will have to learn to work with other men who are not Christians,

but who to some extent share his ideas and his ideals. In some countries Christians have formed their own political parties. Usually this is not a good thing—on so many matters there is no one policy which we can call really Christian. It is better for the Christian, if he can, to work with other groups, knowing that in some things he will differ from them, that his motives will not always be the same as their motives, and that in the end he may have to break away from them. He can do so only if he is willing to recognize that even non-Christians can have good ideas and purposes, and that he may be able to help them, in the light of his Christian knowledge, to understand their own good purposes more clearly. But, as a Christian, he must always retain his right to question, to criticize and to disagree; for he has an inner standard to which everything must be referred, and his colleagues either do not know that standard or are unwilling to submit to it.

Will it not be very dangerous for the Christian to enter into the world in this way? Is he not in danger of losing his own Christian identity? Is he not likely, in working with the world, to accept the world's standards, to compromise, to lose his clear sense of the difference between right and wrong? May he not in the end be risking the salvation of his own soul?

Of course it is very dangerous. Of course he may be risking his own salvation. But that is not the point. The question is simply whether as Christians we are prepared to love the world of men as God loved it. The only way in which He could express His love was by entering into the world as one of us, asking for no favour and no protection. By doing so He showed us how human life ought to be lived. It is only through Jesus Christ that we really know what it means to be a man. And because He loved the world, He was willing to risk everything, to be tempted, to suffer, and in the end to give His life for it. Ought Christians to do less than their Master? If they are prepared to follow Him into the world for which

He died, they are likely to find that they too will have their share of suffering—the world does not always want or welcome what is really good for it. But is there any other way in which they can win the world for Him?

This is a dangerous life. But we are speaking of those who are willing to enter the world *as Christians*. That means that they have two safeguards. The first is that they are pledged to keep their eyes steadily turned towards their Master, so that they always have His standard before their eyes, and know clearly what it is that they are trying to do. The second is that they are never alone. The Church of Christ is a reality; in so far as it is a living Church, it is the home from which we go out into the world as into a foreign land, and to which we come back to be strengthened by our brethren, and to be renewed by contact with the source of our own true life in Jesus Christ.

## CHAPTER SIX

### *THE DESTINY OF MAN*

Of one thing we can feel quite sure—one day life on this planet is going to come to an end. We have no idea how this will come about. It might happen that some wandering star came too near us, drew us out of our regular orbit—and that would mean that all of us in a single moment would be blotted out. Or it may be that our earth will go on getting colder and colder, until no living thing can exist upon it. But, however it may come, the history of man on this earth is going to come to an end. At the bottom of the last page God will write the familiar words “THE END”.

But will that really be the end of everything? Does man just disappear like the flowers of the forest? Will nothing at all be left?

Our communist friends tell us that that is a question that ought not to be asked. You must concentrate on making the world a better place now, and forget about these questions that really have no meaning. But the communists themselves are always talking about the future, that future that is to justify all the sacrifices, and even the crimes, of the present. Have we not the right to ask how far that future extends? Does it go just as far as the death of the last man on earth, and no further?

As a matter of fact, from the very earliest times men have asked the question whether death is the very last end, or whether there is something beyond it. “If a man die, shall he live again?” There is the question, asked almost in despairing tones, in that very ancient work the Book of Job (14 : 14).

We certainly have a right to ask the question. What chance is there of our getting an answer?

The philosophers have discussed the question for centuries on the basis of the knowledge that we have of ourselves.

One of the greatest books in the world is the *Phaedo* of Plato. Socrates has been condemned to death by the Athenians. Plato tells us of the long conversation that he held with his friends in the last hours before his death. He tries to show that none of those causes that result in the death and decay of the body have any effect on the soul, and that therefore we may hope and believe that the soul survives death. The book ends with a glorious passage, describing for us the calm and cheerful way in which that great and good man met his death. Later philosophers have not added much to the arguments that Plato puts forward in this book.

Indian philosophy gives a quite different answer. Who and what am "I"? The real "I" that dwells in my deepest heart is one with the great "I", the soul of the universe. This "I" must wander through countless existences on earth, but in the end it will find its way back to the One unchanging reality, in which it will be swallowed up, as the drop of water is lost in the great ocean. So the true "I" will survive, but I, in the sense of the personal being that I now have, will be completely lost. This doctrine rests on a radical separation of the "soul" of man from his body.

Few people in the ancient world thought that man at his death is completely extinguished; they thought that something went on into the other world; but all that that something can experience beyond the grave is a pale, futile and miserable existence, which cannot be called life. Life is here on earth—existence the other side of death is life which has lost all its joy and its fulness.

Countless people have read and enjoyed the *Odyssey*, the story of the travels of Odysseus. One of the best known parts

of the epic is the tale of Odysseus' descent to the underworld. There he meets the spirits of the dead; they are just wraiths, ghosts, without life or strength. When they have drunk of the blood of the sacrifices, they gain enough strength to be able to speak to Odysseus. But their existence is exactly described by Achilles, when he speaks of the "joyless realms".

It may seem strange that an almost exactly similar idea runs all through the Old Testament. The people of Israel knew so much of God, and yet this knowledge had not grown up into a hope that man may live again with God after his death. In a passage we have already referred to, Job passionately denies this possibility: "As waters fail from a lake, and a river wastes away and dries up, so man lies down and rises not again; till the heavens are no more he will not awake, or be roused out of his sleep" (Job 14 : 11-12). The saddest thing of all, in the Hebrew idea, is that the dead are cut off from the presence of God. For this view we can quote a great many passages. For instance, "The dead do not praise the LORD, nor do any that go down into silence" (Ps. 115 : 17); or from the Psalm of Hezekiah, "For Sheol cannot thank thee, death cannot praise thee; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for thy faithfulness" (Isa. 38 : 18). In this life only can we have fellowship with God. The dead may live on in their children, or in the blessings that God gives to the nation. But as far as real life is concerned, death is the end for the individual, even for the individual who has believed in God.

It is only at the very end of the Old Testament period that we see the dawning of a brighter hope. The clearest utterance of all is in the last chapter of Daniel, "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12 : 2). This hope grew, perhaps under Persian influence, in the period between the Old Testament and the New. But it often took the form of a belief that the pious Jew who had

died would be raised up to live again *on this earth*, in the wonderful kingdom that God was intending to bring into being.

Thus many men had lived without hope; some had lived in hope. But to the great question the final answer was, "We do not know". That is where most people would leave it today. Polls of public opinion, even in so-called Christian countries, have shown that the majority do not believe in any possibility of life after death; a considerable minority is prepared to regard it as possible; only a small minority has any clear and confident hope.

It is only through Jesus Christ that clear and confident hope has entered into the world.

We turn first to look at His teaching. In one tremendous sentence, He has told us all that we need to know: "He is not God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to him" (Luke 20 : 38). God is spoken of as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These were men to whom the word of God came. He had brought them into a living relationship with Himself. Can that relationship be brought to an end just because a man dies? No, says Jesus; God lives for ever, and those who put their trust in Him live also in His life; Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are not just men who lived a long time ago and heard the voice of God and died. They are still alive, and God is still their God.

It is most important to note that Jesus has changed the form of the question. Job had asked, "Can a man live again?" We may well believe that the answer is "No". Jesus puts it in a quite different way. Can a man who has trusted in the living God really die? Once again, the answer is "No". There is no question of man being naturally immortal, or of his having a soul which cannot be touched by death. It is simply a question of his relationship to God. Will God give to man that which man does not naturally have in himself? Will He give Him the

gift of eternal life? To this the answer of Jesus is "Yes". The electric bulb, which shines down on my paper as I type these lines, is a cold dead thing in itself. But, if I switch on the current, power and heat and light flow into it, and it will go on shining as long as the current is flowing. That is a faint picture of what the New Testament means, when it tells us that "the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6 : 23).

Even more important than the words of Jesus are the facts of His resurrection. This is what has given Christians joy and hope in the face of death from the first Easter Day until now. "By His great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1 : 3). Jesus had died. There was no doubt of that. Some of His disciples had seen Him die. Death had done the worst that it could do to Him. And now God had shown, once for all and perfectly clearly, that death does not have the last word: "God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it" (Acts 2 : 24).

The important discovery made by the disciples was that this risen Jesus was exactly the same Jesus, whom they had known before His death. He had new and mysterious powers; but they could speak with Him, as they had always spoken—death had produced no break in the fellowship that they had with Him. This is why they laid such stress on the resurrection of His body. It was the whole Jesus who had been raised by God and was alive, not just some spiritual part of Him. "It is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have" (Luke 24 : 39). A real man; a real death; a real resurrection, in which the whole man is raised in all the perfection of his being. He had promised that those who believe in Him should not see death, but should live as He lives.

It was this experience and this promise that transformed the idea of death for the disciples. To die no longer meant going into some strange, dim, far off world, away from the presence of God; it meant entering into life, "to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better" (Phil. 1 : 23).

So now we know where we stand. What is the destiny of man? If he has believed in the risen Jesus, if he is in Christ, as the New Testament puts it, his hope for the future is full of light and life and glory. The New Testament tells us a great deal about this hope for the Christian. It tells us very much less about the future of those who have never heard of Christ, and of those who have not believed in Him. We may be sure that God has a wise and good purpose for every man. Here we shall study only the destiny of "man in Christ", and will not raise other questions, which are difficult to answer, and on many of which the Bible itself is silent.<sup>1</sup>

"I believe in the resurrection of the body." These are the words of the Creed—and many Christians find them extremely difficult.

In old days the words were taken quite literally by Christians. It was thought that God would gather again out of all His creation every particle which has been part of us, and would raise us again in physical bodies. We can think of all such ideas as a kind of Christian poetry, and we need not try to take them literally. Why then do we keep the words in the Creed, and what can they mean?

They point to something very important in Christian truth. Man, as we have so often said, is a unity. He is not a body in which a spirit happens to dwell. He is not a spirit which happens to have got trapped in a body. Both body and spirit come from God, and together they make up *man*.

<sup>1</sup> A later book in this series will deal more fully with the questions of eternal life and human destiny.

When we live again on the far side of death, it will be the whole of us that will live—the whole of what we sometimes call our personality, that mysterious “I”, which has been built up through all my experiences, through memory and thought and hope. It is that “I” whom God loves, and whom He will raise up. My body is most useful to me here; it is through my body that I express myself in this world. What kind of a body I may need in that other world I simply cannot imagine, and I can leave it to God to decide. Paul tells us that “it is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Cor. 15 : 44). That is as far as human language will take us; we had better be content to recognize that we have no idea of what a spiritual body may be—except that it will be perfectly adapted to our life, and our need to express ourselves, in that other world the true nature of which we cannot even imagine.

For that is the fact. To us death is the limit. Beyond that we can believe and hope, but we cannot see nor know. “Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him” (Rom. 6 : 9). That is the world in which there is no death; that means that it is free from all the limits with which we are familiar in this world. And that is why we cannot even imagine it.

In this world, we live in three dimensions: length, breadth, and height. And there are also three dimensions of our thought. We always have to think in terms of space, time and matter. We cannot think in any other way. We may try to imagine one of those terms away, and in certain moments of vision we may seem to get beyond them; but in reality they are there all the time. Now we know that God is Spirit; He created what we call matter, but matter cannot express His true being. God is eternal. He made time, and works in it, but He is beyond and above time. God meets us just where we are in space. But we cannot say of Him that He is either here

or there. And yet, when we try to speak of "heaven", we find that we are still speaking of it in the old terms of space, time and matter. We know that we are using words which cannot really apply to it; but what else can we do?

One way out of our problem is to speak of all the things that "heaven" is not, and of all the things that are not to be found there.

1. In the first place, there will be no sin there. It is not just that our sins will have been forgiven. That is a great thing. But the greater thing is that we shall no longer be able to sin. Our wills will be perfectly fixed on God, and will never again be able to turn aside from Him. We know that we are happiest here on earth when we are doing God's will; we can faintly imagine what happiness it will be to be able to do only that and nothing else. That will be true freedom.

2. There will be no sorrow there. A great deal of the sorrow in the world comes from sin, but not all of it. This world is not meant to be our permanent home; and God reminds us of this in the dangers that surround our way, and in the disasters that can fall on quite innocent people. But of that world it is said that "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Rev. 7 : 17).

3. There will be no separation there. There will never be any separation from God our life. It was in this hope that Paul wrote "I am sure that neither death, nor life . . . will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8 : 38, 39). That is true and wonderful. But also there will never again be any parting from one another. If we know Christ, there is very little sadness in death. One of the great preachers of my boyhood days wrote a little note to a friend on the last day of his life, and knowing perfectly well that he was dying; the last words of the note were, "We shall meet in the morning." Yet here there is separation from those we love. But there we shall be home. Augustine has expressed it

all in one splendid sentence; heaven, he tells us, is the place where no enemy enters, and whence no friend departs.

So all the New Testament pictures are of a joy that knows no ending. God wants us to be happy in this life, and has given so many rich gifts for us to enjoy. But we know that all these pleasures pass away almost before they have come. In that world there are no such changes.

1. The first source of our joy is that “we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3 : 2). Here we know so little of Him, and love Him so little. There seeing will result in loving; and in that world love can go on increasing without any end.

2. We shall see one another. “Shall we know one another in the other world?” people sometimes ask. That question has already been answered in what we have written about the resurrection of the body; I shall still be I, and you will still be you. But, of course, there will be a difference. Natural human affection is a wonderful thing. There is an even more wonderful thing—the love that unites Christians just because they are Christians, that leaps across all the barriers of age and race and language and makes us one. But even this is imperfect. We can never know one another completely, and many of us find it hard to express what is deepest in our hearts. But there we shall see one another as the stars; and, as Paul tells us, one star differs from another in glory.

3. The life of that world is a life of service. If it were a life of idleness, perhaps we should not be much interested in going there. What kinds of task God may still have for us to do we do not know. We do know that our joy will be in serving Him. Here our service is always imperfect; it is spoiled by our ignorance or impatience or selfishness; and often the work we have done with so much labour does not seem to amount to very much. But there the work will be

proportioned to our strength, and we shall be able, as we are not able here, to make a perfect offering to Him.

All this may seem very far away and remote. Has it anything to say to us in our ordinary life to-day? We may end by looking briefly at three problems.

1. How are we to think of those who have gone ahead of us, and are now in that other world?

Here again it is important not to pretend that we know more than we do. For instance, we are in the world of time; the clock goes on ticking, and measures minutes and hours and days. We just do not know whether time exists in the same way for our friends on the other side. It may exist, but we do not know. This means that it is impossible for us to picture what their condition may be. All we know is that, if they are in Christ, we can be perfectly happy about them. They are in God's hand; and, whatever His further purpose for them may be, it is certainly going forward to completion.

From very early times Christians have been accustomed to pray for their friends in the other world. Many Christians, however, do not pray for them. They thank God on every remembrance of them. They rejoice in the fellowship that we have with them in Christ. They look forward with joy to meeting them again. But they do not pray for them, because they cannot think of any prayer that would be appropriate to their situation.

2. How are we to think of those who are not in Christ?

If all the things we have written are true, God has chosen them, no less than us, for a glorious destiny in Christ. But somehow they are missing the way. In a world where God means them to be splendidly rich as His children, they are miserably poor. Where God means them to be men after the pattern of His Son, they are no better than poor caricatures of what it really means to be a man. Would we deny bread to a starving man? If we have seen what life in Christ can be,

must we not be filled with a passionate desire that every single human creature should have it? They may have a great many other things; but if they have not found Christ, they are missing the one thing that really matters.

### 3. How am I to think about myself?

Eternal life is not something that is going to come to us after we die. If the New Testament is true, and if we are in Christ, we have it already: "He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son has not life" (1 John 5 : 12). No doubt we shall be wonderfully changed; but there will be no sudden break—I shall still be I. This means that I have to take seriously the terrifying truth that I may have to go on living with myself for ever and ever. And that is hardly a pleasant prospect—apart from the limitless resources of the grace of God, which really can change even people like you and me.

The message of everlasting life comes, then, as a solemn warning: "What sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God?" (2 Peter 3 : 11, 12.)

That day will come and will not tarry. But we are not there yet. We have to turn back from the splendid vision of the city of God to the perhaps rather drab and dreary vistas of our earthly city. We have to turn the pages back from chapter 6 to chapter 5 of this book, with all that that implies of hard work, service without reward, sometimes frustration and failure. But, if we have really read chapter 6, some of the light of it will fall back on chapter 5. And our last word shall come from St. Paul in his great chapter on the resurrection: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15 : 58).

## *About this book . . .*

It might be supposed that man had more knowledge about himself than about any other field of study—after all he can know himself from within as well as by observation. But, in point of fact, man has always been a problem to himself. Is he just a highly developed animal and no more? Has he an eternal destiny, or is death the end of everything for him? He rises above the animals in some ways, but in others seems to fall far below them. If he is not just an animal, what is it that makes him really different from the animals? Why is his being so often tormented by inner conflict and unhappiness? Why does peace on earth remain a pleasing dream? The central theme of this book is that the nature of man cannot be understood except in the light of that personal relationship to God, without which man is always an incomplete being. When God becomes the centre of human existence, man is on the way to understanding his problems, and to finding a practical solution of them in a truly human existence for man in himself, in society and in the Church.

This is the fifth contribution made to World Christian Books by its General Editor, Bishop Stephen Neill. A fuller development of some of the ideas expressed in this book will be found in Bishop Neill's much larger book *A Genuinely Human Existence*, published in 1959.

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